

## Sleeping in the Light

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## Sleeping in the Light

by [emilywaters1976](#)

### Summary

There was no escaping that light. And yet, he got used to it. And then – he realized he couldn't do without it anymore.

The door opens to a large bedroom. There isn't much furniture here, in fact, just a double bed and a bedside table. The ceilings are high, and the enormous floor-to-ceiling window, uncurtained, overlooks the ocean.

The beach is empty. Always empty, not a soul around here, just miles and miles of tightly packed white sand, all uncharted... all theirs.

Severus realizes that this is the reason Harry picked this place back then, three years ago. Close enough to Tecate, should one prefer walking to Apparition, and yet secluded, isolated, disconnected from the rest of the world...

"What do you think?" Harry asks.

Severus stares blankly, not really understanding what he's being asked. Then, he clarifies:

"Think - about what?"

"The bedroom. Do you like it?"

"Of course I like it."

Severus' voice is calm, even, no trace of sarcasm or irritation, but Harry instantly looks ... sad, somehow. And yet, Harry regroups quickly and continues to talk:

“I came here from time to time. I mean – maybe six or seven times, while you were... away. First it was just to test the Fidelius, make sure it’s still holding, that I did everything right. But then – then, I slept here, and I checked out the town. It’s really neat, though not many people speak English, so I had to learn Spanish.”

“That’s very...” Severus pauses, searching for an appropriate word. It’s difficult, he has no words for this, no words for what Harry does, for what Harry is. He finally settles on “commendable.”

“I slept in this bed, too,” Harry adds. “Wished you were here.”

Severus is startled by that. His fingers brush against Harry’s elbow.

“I’m here now.”

“I know. So I get to keep you?”

“For as long as you like.”

“Might be a very long time,” Harry warns with a forced grin. “In fact, I’m quite sure that it will be.”

“An incarceration without a definite term. Seems cruel.” Severus almost smiles. Or rather, he wants to, but the smile never makes it.

“That’s me. Cruel and hardened,” Harry catches on quickly. “Though if it makes you feel any better, I suppose I can make it more definite. How does a lifetime sound?”

“Much better. Your compassion overwhelms me,” Severus says dryly. He still hasn’t made a move to unpack his belongings, or even sit on the bed. He needs to do that. He needs to do something. The different “needs” are racing through his head, and he doesn’t know which one to listen to.

“What?” Harry asks, giving him a wary look.

“Is there another bedroom?” Severus inquires finally.

“You don’t like it after all?” Harry looks at Severus, as if asking him to be kind enough to cross the t’s and dot the i’s.

“I’d like my own bedroom. If possible.”

“Oh. Well, keep this one.”

“You seem to be fond of it. You should take it,” Severus insists.

“I’ll take the one down the hall. It’s cozy. It overlooks the garden.”

“Harry.”

Harry seems tired of arguing.

“If you don’t like this one, feel free to take any other one. There are five bedrooms here. I reckoned, maybe we’d want to have some company one day. Later.”

“All right. Thank you.”

When Harry leaves, Severus finally places the shoulder-bag on the floor. How odd: all that he’s got left to his name fits into this small bag – a few changes of clothes, toothbrush, toothpaste, a razor, a comb, a few books, a wand and some money. That is all.

For the longest time he stares at the bed. The bed is right next to the floor-to-ceiling window. It will be strange to sleep like this, Severus thinks, almost like sleeping outdoors, but he doesn’t want to move to another bedroom.

He takes his robe off, folds it carefully, places it on the nightstand. He unlaces his boots next. All in all, his actions feel like a ritual he’d developed in the last three years. That thought isn’t accompanied by resentment, as it probably should be.

Severus lies down on the bed and finds it entirely too soft. Impossibly soft, uncomfortably so. He knows he won’t be able to sleep like this. He reaches for the bag and pulls out his wand. A few spells, and the bed is firm, even hard – and that’s much better.

Everything here calms him and soothes him: the sound of the ocean, the daylight, streaming through the window, so bright – so bright, he can actually fall asleep. He needs to – he hasn’t slept much in over a week.

He falls asleep, privately wondering whether Harry would come and sit down next to him and take his hand.

Harry doesn’t come.

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Harry came to visit him at St Mungo's three years ago. When Severus opened his eyes, he saw Harry, next to his bed. Severus didn’t ask him any questions – he just saw him and knew that everything was all right, everything worked out. He didn’t notice right away that Harry was holding his hand. When he did notice, it surprised him, but he wasn’t angry. He wasn’t exactly happy about it either – just mildly confused, but it felt good, so he let it be.

They talked later. Not at any great length – but Harry told him everything, Severus heard him out. And once again, he felt good – for the first time in he couldn’t remember how many years.

Then Harry asked, a bit uncertain:

“Are you still angry with me?”

Severus shook his head. It seemed impossible to be angry – to remain angry – after everything that had happened. After thinking that Harry was going to die. Maybe Severus’ anger just followed Harry and died there with him, and didn’t come back.

“And you – with me?” It seemed like a reasonable question to ask.

“No,” Harry said quickly. “I don’t suppose I can be. Not after everything.”

Harry stayed by his side. He no longer held Severus' hand, simply talked some more. Severus didn't listen all that closely. He just heard Harry's voice and knew that everything was... fine.

Those one-sided conversations felt good, too, much like Harry's hand in his. He found himself wanting to capture some more of that elusive feeling, though he wasn't sure how to do that, he'd never been at all proficient in capturing what's "good."

In the end, he ended up kissing Harry.

Harry was sitting on the chair; Severus walked to the window and stopped, towering over him. He simply intended to take Harry's hand one more time – but instead ended up kissing him – on the forehead. Harry leapt off the chair, stood up straight and stared at him.

Then, Harry kissed him back - on the lips.

After that Severus wasn't thinking anything that he likely should have considered, things like "why," "what on earth are we doing," "do we need this" – nothing at all. He was simply kissing his fill.

They ended up fucking right on the hospital bed and, luckily, Harry remembered to flick his wand and lock the door beforehand, because Severus wasn't thinking of anything. He was simply kissing Harry, undressing him, touching him, holding and hugging him, kissing some more – the lips, the chin, the shoulders, the path along Harry's spine, and Harry was so young-beautiful-impossibly-alive, so good, and Severus wanted him, and could no longer imagine any sort of "good" without Harry.

When it was all over, and Harry unlocked the door, they were treated to the sight of some very displeased mediwitches, who were eyeing Harry with obvious suspicion. Harry was dishevelled and the tail of his shirt was tucked into his trousers rather awkwardly. As for Severus, he was lying in bed on his back, giving the impression of a dreadfully sick man, truly exhausted and incapable of anything even mildly inappropriate.

Out of the corner of his eye Severus also noticed two Aurors standing at attention. He was surprised again; he didn't think he needed protection.

Then Harry explained, "They aren't protecting you, exactly. They're... well, they're guarding you. So you don't run away before the trial."

It was then that Severus remembered – ah, yes, there needs to be a trial, of course. Though that didn't exactly concern him – the healers had said that they wouldn't let him out anytime soon, two more months, to be exact.

And Harry came over every day, and brought with him that impossible goodness that Severus had grown addicted to – and two months seemed like a very long time. A lifetime, and a good one at that.

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When Severus wakes up, it's almost evening. He walks to the kitchen. Harry is sitting at the table,

reading a book. He lifts his head to smile at Severus and hands him a bread and cheese sandwich. Severus eats the sandwich and stares at Harry, studies him. Harry... has grown thin over the last three years. He looks tired now, worn out somehow. Severus finds it odd that he notices it only now; after all, he saw Harry once a month over the last three years... and yet, he didn't notice those things.

Harry intercepts his gaze and smiles again.

"There's a neat little town nearby. Remember, I told you? Tecate. It's really quiet and small; I like it a lot. It's sunny and green even on Christmas... you know, it's strange, it almost seems like there's no winter here. I mean – there is winter, of course, it's just that, compared to England, it feels like the summer. Everything feels like the summer here."

"Indeed." Severus almost doesn't recognize his own voice. It feels odd to talk, everything seems so bloody awkward; he wonders why, but no – not really. He knows exactly why.

"Yes. I like the food there. You can build your own taco or your own fajita, and ... well, I love Mexican food in general."

"One could never tell, looking at you," Severus says dryly, "that you like any sort of food. You're skin and bones."

"You're the one to talk!" Harry seems actually mildly affronted by that.

"I've always been this way. You, on the other hand..."

Harry waves him off.

"Fine. You're right, I've grown lazy. Let's go to town tomorrow. We'll buy groceries, then you can cook and feed me."

"I can do that," Severus agrees, and that feels right, almost good. He tries to hold on to that feeling. "By the way, we need to discuss the finances."

"All right. Let's do that."

They talk about it and review the financial records. The house that Harry had bought for them was expensive - Severus' savings aren't enough to contribute equally. Harry tries to wave him off, "later," but Severus insists. He gives Harry his savings, keeping two hundred Galleons as spending money. He reckons it's better this way: having limited funds at hand will force him to search for a job, or start brewing potions again...

Harry doesn't argue. He kisses Severus on the lips and retreats for the night.

Severus walks to his own bedroom. He undresses and goes to bed. The room is dark, and it's dark outside too – the starlit sky, the black stripe of the ocean... it's so dark, it's impossible to fall asleep. The ocean roars. Severus likes that: even if he doesn't fall asleep, he can just lie and rest, and listen to the ocean and let it soothe him. For some reason, it almost aches to allow himself to be soothed by the ocean.

In the morning Harry and Severus go to Tecate. Severus finds himself enjoying that – the warm morning, the cool breeze of the wind, the sunlit asphalt of the road under his feet, the small, two-

storey houses, the tiny shops. The Muggle and the wizarding world of Mexico exist side by side, not really intersecting all that much, but being more aware of each other than Severus is used to.

Throughout their shopping trip, Harry keeps looking at him expectantly. Severus doesn't know what Harry is expecting from him.

The trip is fully uneventful; they purchase the groceries and return home.

In the evening Severus cooks, not letting Harry anywhere near the stove. Harry doesn't seem to mind, taking everything in his stride. Only... Harry continues to watch him, study him. And, when Severus retreats to his bedroom, Harry follows him, sits down on his bed and once again kisses him on the lips.

Severus kisses him back. He undresses Harry, touches him, holds him; for the first time in three years, he gets to hold Harry. He tries to remember how good it once felt – he really wants to remember, and realizes that he can't.

Harry, now fully naked, lies on his bed and stares at him quizzically. Severus is still fully dressed and he belatedly realizes that he needs to undress, he needs to touch Harry again, he needs to... the different "needs" become a sorry mess in his head, and Severus doesn't know which one to attend to first.

"It's okay," Harry says, "You don't need to do anything. Let's just fall asleep together."

Severus shakes his head ever so slightly.

Harry bites his lip and sits up in bed.

"All right."

The silence between them is tense when Harry quietly gathers his clothes off the floor and, without bothering to get dressed, walks to the door. Right as he's about to exit, he turns around and gives Severus a tiny smile.

"You should just get some sleep. I will do the same. We can do the rest some other time. Later."

"All right," Severus agrees, and adds, "I'm sorry."

"It's all right. It's been a long time, and I kind of knew it'd be this way between us. Well, I've been hoping that maybe not – but..." Harry sighs. "Are you sure you don't want another bedroom?"

"I'm sure."

"You know, if the ocean is too noisy, we can put up a silencing charm around the window..."

"I know." Severus is too embarrassed to admit that the ocean rather soothes him, and so he doesn't. He simply looks away. When he casts a glance at the door, he finds that Harry is gone.

Severus finds himself wanting to run after him, stop him, make him come back right-fucking-now, try again; the desire is so strong, it's almost overwhelming. Then he decides that Harry's words make sense. Another time. Later. Only... Severus doesn't know when that "later" will be.

Severus lies in bed and shuts his eyes, thinking, “Damn me to hell. What have I done to us?”

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There would be no surprises at the trial, everything was known beforehand. Harry found out as much as he could, and brought the news that Severus would be sentenced to three years of Azkaban – at least three, but at any rate, no more than four. Severus understood that all too well – there were too many questionable things he’d participated in throughout his spying career. He had no regrets, not really – back then, those things seemed necessary, and that was all that mattered. He had no desire to second-guess himself or blame himself, reckoning that since others were eager to do it for him, he himself needn’t bother.

Harry didn’t seem troubled, either. He was smiling.

“I’ve got it all worked out, Severus. Take a look at this.”

Severus stared at the map of Mexico before him and did his best to follow Harry’s disorganized, rapid talking, “we’ll just run away from here,” “Fidelius,” “no extradition treaty,” “Ron and Hermione will come over to visit,” “Luna will be the Secret Keeper.”

“No.”

Harry gave him a shocked stare.

“What do you mean, no? You don’t like Mexico, fine. Let’s go to Japan.”

Severus shook his head.

“No.”

“Why not?”

“I don’t want to run.”

“Why not?”

“I don’t want to hide. I don’t want to be on the run. I don’t want to be an outlaw. I think you of all people should understand.”

“Severus, nobody will bloody care if you run away. Nobody will look for you. I think they’re secretly hoping that you will just disappear before the trial and save them the trouble of having to deal with you.”

“I don’t want to.”

Harry ran his hand through his hair, looking angry and frightened at once.

“Let me understand. You’re feeling so bloody guilty about what you did in the war, you actually want to go to Azkaban for another three years?”

“No. It might surprise you, but I don’t feel guilty at all.”

“Then why?”

Severus shrugged his shoulders.

“Because, Harry. This is my world, too. Hogwarts, Diagon Alley, the bloody St. Mungo’s – everything, I’ve ended up investing a great deal of time and effort into it, I’m entitled to it as much as anyone else, and I will not allow them to drive me out of here without a possibility of coming back.”

Harry was quiet, considering his words.

“Fine. I suppose I understand. If you change your mind, let me know.”

“I will do that.”

Severus didn’t change his mind.

It likely would have been easy – to run away. Doubly so, because he had a good thing going with Harry. The only thing stopping Severus was the vague suspicion that, had he allowed his world, the world he was entitled to, to be taken away from him, this “good thing” with Harry risked turning sour very quickly.

“I’ll visit you,” Harry muttered. “They allow visits in Azkaban nowadays. They even allow to bring you stuff.”

Severus smirked at that. And, out loud, he said:

“That’s a good thing, then, isn’t it?”

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Severus doesn’t sleep. The ocean continues to roar, reminding him of the roar of the North Sea back in Azkaban. The bed is firm, just like back there. Only three years, and he got used to listening to the ocean, to sleeping on the firm surface – no, not just “used,” he got conditioned to it, like a dog; he can’t do without all that anymore. Eventually, he reckons, he will learn to sleep in silence, he will get used to softer beds, but he doesn’t know when. It stings to realize that.

He still can’t fall asleep when it’s dark. He considers turning the light on, but decides against it. It’s time he got used to the dark again; he needs to, he needs to remember how to be normal again; giving in to that fucking need for the light would be just too much.

Severus doesn’t sleep.

In the morning he looks out of the window. He sees Harry, completely naked, walking the beach, from time to time picking up a starfish, left behind by the tide, and throwing it back into the ocean.

The morning is sunny and bright.



Severus wants to fall asleep.

Severus gets dressed and leaves the house, heading toward Harry.

Harry greets him with a smile and winks at him.

“Hey. Will you cook us breakfast?”

“Why don’t you cook it?” Severus replies.

“I’m too lazy.” Harry smiles unrepentantly.

“What makes you think I’m not?”

“Well, I don’t really care, you know.” A shrug and another smile follow.

Severus stares at Harry and realizes that he doesn’t know him. Not really. This beautiful-happy-go-lucky-carefree-so-kind-to-him naked boy is a stranger to him. Severus wonders when they managed to become strangers to each other...

Harry walks up to him and presses his face into Severus’ shoulder. Severus silently strokes Harry’s bare back, draws him into an embrace. They are quiet for a while.

“I didn’t know it’d be like this,” Severus says finally.

“Do you want to leave?” Harry asks.

Severus doesn’t reply right away. He continues to hold Harry close, thinking that he really should leave. Because Merlin knows, this is ridiculous. They’re trying to recapture what they once had, and they just aren’t making it. There’s only awkwardness, and not knowing what to say to each other, and fragments of conversations of the two strangers who used to know each other in some other lifetime.

“Severus?” Harry’s voice breaks ever so slightly.

Severus presses a kiss to his forehead and answers:

“I don’t know what the future holds. I really don’t know anything. But –it’s only been a week. If you’re willing, we can give it more time. Keep trying. If nothing works in a month, or two, or three – then we can revisit this conversation.”

Harry breathes out into his shoulder.

“Okay. What... what are we going to do, if things don’t work out in the end?”

“We’ll be friends. Good friends. We’ll visit each other and play chess.”

“Do you even play chess?” Harry snuffles and gives a brief, unhappy laugh.

“No. But I’m willing to learn.”

“Do you want to go back to England?” Harry asks.

Severus shuts his eyes, remembering all at once: the towers of Hogwarts, the Ministry of Magic, Diagon Alley, Malfoy Manor, Manchester and London, and everything feels foggy and odd and fragmented.

“No. You were right about choosing this place. It’s not bad at all. And ... it’s always the summer here.”

“Yeah,” Harry agrees. “And it’s so bright here,” he lifts his face, shutting his eyes in pleasure, as the sunlight touches his cheeks.

“Yes,” Severus agrees quietly. “It’s very bright here all the time.”

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Harry visited Severus every month, once a month, forty-five minutes per visit. He brought books, changes of clothes and even chocolate.

“There’s no need for that,” Severus said, staring at the chocolate bar in Harry’s hands. “No more Dementors, remember? The wizarding world is very civilized these days.”

Harry rolled his eyes.

“So you will only eat chocolate in the presence of a Dementor?”

“Perhaps not even then.”

Harry devoured the chocolate bar and made a show of licking his fingers. Severus smiled.

Harry never missed a visit: first Monday of each month, forty-five minutes. With every visit those forty-five minutes seemed longer and longer and were filled with more and more silence.

Severus didn’t know what to say to Harry, and Harry seemed to have run out of things to talk about, or maybe he just lost interest in the comings and goings of the wizarding world around him.

Sometimes, Harry tried to break through that silence with questions. He asked Severus if he’s sleeping all right, if they’re feeding him enough, and so on. Severus answered dutifully: yes, the Dementors are really gone, he’s sleeping just fine, no, it’s not cold here, no, he isn’t scared, yes, there’s enough food, yes, they’re letting him keep the books, and yes, they even bring him the newspapers. Harry seemed comforted by those answers.

Sometimes Severus wanted to say that his cell is always bright, impossibly bright, day or night. But he reckoned there was no point in saying that, so he didn’t.

When Severus’ time was up, Harry met him, bringing along a change of Muggle clothing.

They embraced briefly and walked to a coffee shop of Harry’s choosing, which turned out to be Starbucks. They sat together in silence and drank the coffee, and Harry munched on a gingerbread biscuit, while Severus stared at him, trying to understand why they’re together like this after all this time. He wanted to understand what exactly Harry had been waiting for these three years, and

whether Severus still had anything left to give to Harry. He realized that he didn't know.

That night they slept together at Grimmauld Place. To be more exact, Harry slept. Severus was lying by his side in silence and tried to sleep – and couldn't. He only fell asleep when the sun came up and daylight began to pour in through the bedroom window.

Harry didn't bother him, allowing him to sleep till noon.

After lunch, Severus went to Gringotts and took out his savings, thanking his lucky stars that the goblins couldn't care less about the Ministry's desire to confiscate this or that.

The following day, another sleepless night later, Severus began his job search. Some prospects came up right away – Minerva was calling him to rejoin Hogwarts' staff, and Slughorn was more than willing to retire, St. Mungo's offered him a researcher's position, and he even got an owl from Durmstrang.

Evening found Severus by the fireplace at Grimmauld. He was thinking intently, considering his options, not knowing what to choose.

He wondered if he'd forgotten how to choose.

"Have you decided yet?" Harry asked.

"No."

Harry was sitting in the armchair across the room from him, and looked very much like a sparrow with all its feathers ruffled up.

"You don't really need to work, you know." Harry said. "I don't either. I've got... well, I've got everything. We can just... live. And do whatever."

"Whatever," Severus echoed. "What have you been doing for the last three years, by the way?"

Harry stared at him, surprised.

"I've told you already."

Severus bowed his head, realizing that he couldn't remember. He could barely remember Harry's visits and their conversations; everything was blurred, fuzzy, unclear. Then again, he could barely remember the books he'd read in Azkaban, or what he'd thought about back there. It seemed that the only thing that got etched into his memory was the light. That impossible light in his cell, like daylight, only sharper, fiercer, angrier. It singed his eyes, making them ache, it made him nauseated, it seemed to find its way even under the blanket he'd throw over his head. There was no escaping that light. And yet, he got used to it. And then – he realized he couldn't do without it anymore.

"I wasn't doing anything," Harry muttered. "Well, that is, I studied on my own a bit. I was reading up on the theory of magic. And some books, too. Muggle books. I've been reading about Mexico."

"Mexico," Severus mused. "So tell me, that house in Mexico... is it still there?"

"Of course it is, where else would it be? I even kept the Fidelius around it. I mean, I certainly don't

mind it, and Luna doesn't mind being the Keeper..."

"I see," Severus whispered. "Maybe we should go there."

Harry seemed surprised. Severus could understand that – he actually managed to surprise himself by that suggestion. After digging his heels into the familiar ground, after refusing to run and give up on the world he felt so entitled to – to just let it all go. Throw it all away and run away in the end.

It was fucking laughable.

Harry didn't laugh. He just smiled and said:

"You know what? Let's do that."

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The evening comes. Severus continues to stare at Harry. Harry glances back from time to time, his expression guarded, wary. Resigned. It stings to see that; it never used to be that way.

When Harry gets up to retreat to his own bedroom, Severus stops him, taking his hand.

"Don't go."

Harry smiles unhappily.

"Want me to teach you to play chess?"

"No. That's not what I want."

They end up walking to Severus' bedroom together again.

The bedroom is dark, and the black sky seems to be hovering right behind the enormous window, threatening to crush the glass and force its way in.

Harry sits on Severus' bed and shifts uncomfortably.

"It's really... hard. I didn't notice that last time."

"I like it this way. Do you mind?"

"No, I don't mind. It's all right."

Harry doesn't undress and doesn't reach for him and doesn't kiss him. He simply sits on the bed and waits.

It hurts to see him this way: sullen, uncertain, unsure of anything. Not knowing what to do.

It never used to be this way, Severus thinks again. He would do anything, give anything, to turn back the clock. He doesn't know how.

Still not knowing much of anything, Severus begins to undress.

Harry stares at him, surprised, and manages a smile, after all. Still cautiously, tentatively, he reaches for Severus, strokes his chest, runs a palm down to his belly. It feels good; Severus shuts his eyes, allowing himself a small sigh of contentment.

And then, Harry reaches for Severus and kisses him on the lips, with all the fire and the goodness of their first kiss.

Severus doesn't know what he did right this time and why that goodness is back, but he reckons it's not important.

And it feels so good – to simply lie naked and open before Harry, who, still clothed, straddles his hips, leans into him, kisses his mouth, cheeks, chin; grasps his shoulders and pins him to the bed, covering his neck and chest with more kisses. Severus cards his fingers through Harry's hair, touches his face, then pulls Harry's tee shirt off of him, runs his hands over Harry's bare chest, unable to get enough of Harry's skin on his palms, and it all feels so good, he can hardly credit it.

Eventually Harry shifts down, sits between his legs, makes him bend the knees, lifting him, spreading him open, and then – opening him so slowly that it aches, but in a good way.

Fistfuls of sheet squeezed between his fingers, Severus pushes back, as hard as he can, pressing himself into Harry, onto Harry, taking Harry into himself.

And when all is done, Harry collapses on top of him, exhausted and sighing happily, and kisses his mouth yet again.

“Let's fall asleep together,” Harry says.

“I won't fall asleep,” Severus says. For some reason it's really easy to say that, not embarrassing at all. There's no shame left, none whatsoever.

“Why won't you?” Harry asks.

“I can only sleep in the daytime now. I'm too used to sleeping in the light.”

Harry shifts next to him. Then, a very reasonable question follows:

“Why is that?”

Severus is slow to answer, but not out of embarrassment or shame – it's just a habit, nothing more than that.

“Azkaban. You see, it was ... odd there. The Dementors are no more, but their ... essence, so to speak, remained. Embedded in the walls, in the stone, in the very prison itself. And the effect is... much the same.”

“And?” Harry asks. Severus can sense his tension.

“There are spells for that, you see,” Severus explains. “A plethora of spells, designed to remove that Dementor-effect from the prisoners' dwellings. To make it all more ... humane. More

reasonable. And those spells worked quite well. Only... because of them, it was always very bright in the cell. There was that... impossible light. All the time.”

“I see,” Harry says very calmly. “You couldn’t sleep?”

“At first, I couldn’t. I got used to it eventually. And... I didn’t realize how much, until I got out and found myself unable to sleep without the light.”

Harry sighs and strokes Severus’ palm with the tips of his fingers.

“So turn the light on and sleep. Why are you torturing yourself?”

“I’m... trying to get used to the night again,” Severus says bitterly, unable to credit how much it irks him to be forced to give in to that light. “I’m trying to be normal, Harry. Without much success so far, I must add.”

Harry gets out of bed and looks for his wand. Finding it, he flicks it, and a moment later, there’s a candle on the floor, a tall one, wax dripping down the sides, flame burning bright, but the light is ... different. Different from daylight, and different from the regular candle-light, too. This light feels soft, mild, gentle... but somehow, it also feels stronger, more powerful than the sun itself, or even that horrible light of the Azkaban cell.

This light... it feels like home. It feels like Harry.

“How’s that?” Harry asks, sitting on the floor and leaning against the edge of the bed.

“I don’t know,” Severus says, and there’s a catch in his voice. He has no words for this kind of light. He has no words for anything, really. He finally settles on “good.” “It’s good. Very good.”

“Give it a try, then,” Harry urges. “You know, we can try all kinds of things to figure out what works and what doesn’t. And we can try them together, just the two of us. And one day, we’ll manage everything we want. Like falling asleep together and stuff like that. Just not today – later.”

The pillows under his chest, Severus pulls the blanket over himself and turns to lie on his side. Harry is still sitting on the floor, not moving, the wand in his left hand. Severus can swear that he can see the thin, barely perceptible golden strands of magic, extending from the tip of Harry’s wand, forming an arch over the bed, stretching to the candle – sustaining it, sustaining this new kind of light.

Severus lifts his hand, runs his fingers through Harry’s hair and then his arm falls limp, hanging off the side of the bed, until his knuckles touch the wooden floor.

His eyelids are growing heavy, and Severus begins to believe that he really will fall asleep this time. And eventually, there will come a night when he and Harry will fall asleep together; and a morning, when they will wake up together; and they will have the whole day ahead of them to try out all kinds of things; and whatever they want will come to them, either on that day, or some other day after that, the day that Harry calls “later.”

~FIN

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